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AUTHOR Stein, Sheryl E.
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ABSTRACT

This digest examines prekindergarten teacher licensure, which enables states to ensure a level of specialized knowledge and experience among early childhood professionals. A recent movement toward specialization has led to more states offering early childhood education licenses (which is beneficial since the best predictor of appropriate teacher behavior is the amount of formal education and training). As acknowledgement of the educational aspects of preschool education increases, state education agencies are receiving regulatory power over public preschool programs. This often conflicts with state social service agencies' regulation of custodial day care programs. High quality programs must encompass both education and social services. Different states offer various configurations of preschool credentials (e.g., early childhood education licenses distinct from elementary licenses, and title-specific licensure denoting the license range). Distinctions are made among early childhood professionals regarding credentials and compensation, with the public sector paying teachers better than the private sector and salaries higher in early education than in child care. (SM)

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Prekindergarten Teacher Licensure

Sheryl E. Stein

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Prekindergarten Teacher Licensure

Sheryl E. Stein

This digest considers prekindergarten teacher licensure, a process which enables states to ensure a certain level of specialized knowledge and experience among early childhood professionals. Trained individuals with knowledge of child development are needed to provide appropriate experiences and interaction which will contribute to the growth and development of young children (Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 1989, p. 317). The past few years have seen increased concern that teachers receive sufficient preparation in both subject matter areas and grade levels (Cooper & Eisenhart, 1990, p. 185).The movement toward specialization in grade levels and subject matter has led to an increased number of states offering specialized early childhood education licenses rather than the broadly scoped credentials (e.g.,Kindergarten through Grade Eight) common to many states up until the 1980s. At the start of the 1990s, over one-half of the states including the District of Columbia offer early childhood education credentials in one form or another; some cover preschool while others begin at kindergarten (AACTE,1990, p. viii; Cooper & Eisenhart, 1990, pp. 186-87).

Training Impacts Quality

As noted in a report from the National Governors' Association (*Taking Care: State Developments in Child Care*, 1990), the National Child Care Staffing Study found that the best predictor of appropriate teacher behavior--having an understanding of the development and needs of children--is the amount of formal education, followed by the amount of training, an individual possesses (National Governors' Association, 1990, p. 6; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989, pp. 40-48). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has suggested that appropriate teacher behavior may result from knowledge and experience including"...college-level, specialized preparation in early childhood education/child development...current knowledge of child development and its application of early childhood educational practice..." (Bredekamp, 1987, p.14).

Regulatory Approaches

States can theoretically ensure that personnel working with children have appropriate training through regulations which require that particular educational or experiential criteria be met. However, a historic argument over whether early childhood programs are custodial, educational, or both has resulted in a dichotomous approach to regulation (Caldwell, 1989; Hayes, Palmer, & Zaslow, 1990, pp. 7-8;Mitchell, 1989, p. 665).

Caldwell (1989) notes that early childhood education programs were originally designed as a service "for 'normal' children from intact, middle-class families with enough economic resources to pay for a service not considered essential enough by society at large to have been provided as a free and universally available public service." Custodial day care, on the other hand, operated as much as a service for parents as for the children, as such programs would provide care for children who were often socially and/or economically disadvantaged while a parent(s) worked (p. 405-6). Caldwell argues that high quality early childhood programs must encompass both worlds: "they must be comprehensive, integrated programs"(p. 413).

Because one type of program was conceptually considered a program of education and the other a program of social welfare, regulatory control of programs was placed in the agency with a similar mission. Thus, programs seen as custodial traditionally have been regulated within the state's social service agency. With the growing realization of the educational aspects of early childhood programs, state education agencies have received regulatory power over public preschool programs (Mitchell, 1989, p. 666). This dichotomous arrangement can create problems, the severity of which ranges from inhibiting program planning, coordination, and advocacy to creating a two-tiered system that segregates children by income levels (Hayes et al., 1990, p. 8). Although some states have developed a coordinated approach, preschool licensure and programs continue to be regulated predominantly by state departments of education.

Types of Preschool Credentials

As a rule, teachers must hold some type of certification or license to work in the public school system. What constitutes an early childhood education credential and whether the state requires such a credential are two different issues. McCarthy (1988) notes several different configurations of preschool credentials (p. 2).

1. Some states offer an *early childhood education license* that is separate and distinct from an elementary license. Such a license may include kindergarten and primary elementary grades up to grade three but is still not attached to the elementary license. It should not be assumed that this credential provides coverage for the same-aged children across all states offering such a credential, as some states' credentials cover work with children from birth through age four and others with children from ages five through nine (McCarthy, 1988). For instance, Minnesota offers an early childhood license which covers birth through age five and Missouri offers a license covering Nursery through Grade 3 (AACTE, 1990, pp. 64, 70; McCarthy, 1988, Table 7).
2. Several states offer "*title-specific certification*," where

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the title of the credential denotes the range of the license; for instance, Prekindergarten Certification, Nursery through Grade 6 (N-6) Certification (McCarthy, 1988). For example, Ohio offers the Prekindergarten Certificate (AACTE, 1990, p. 94)

3. Another pattern noted is that of *early childhood education endorsements*, which are added to elementary education credentials. Sometimes, this endorsement solely encompasses kindergarten; other times, it includes nursery as well (McCarthy, 1988, p. 3). An example of this is Wisconsin's early childhood endorsement, which encompasses both (AACTE, 1990, p. 130). Requirements for such endorsements vary from state to state.

4. Another pattern McCarthy finds is that of *elementary education credentials* which include kindergarten (1988, p. 3). Some states have added nursery onto their elementary education credential, as New Jersey did in January 1990 (AACTE,1990, p. 80).

5. With the recent passage of P.L. 94-142 and P.L. 99-457, legislation concerned with *preschool education for special needs children*, some states have created credentials which acknowledge preparation in both early childhood and special education, like Delaware (AACTE, p. 22).

6.Finally, McCarthy (1988) notes that there are a few states which *do not offer any credentials* for teaching preschoolers but allow individuals holding an elementary education license to teach children of kindergarten age or younger (p. 4). Of the four states she mentions, only one state, Idaho, still does not offer an early childhood credential.

Credentials and Compensation

Spodek and Saracho (1990) note that distinctions are made among early childhood professionals with regard to compensation: "(1) between public school-sponsored programs and non-public school programs, whether sponsored by public or private agencies and (2) between teachers in child care programs and educational programs" (p.23). They note that early childhood teachers working in public programs must meet the same standards for preparation as their teacher counterparts who work with older children. Hayes et al. (1990) note that the public sector pays better and provides more benefits (i.e., health insurance) to teachers than the private sector; moreover, they find that child care workers in public settings earn more than their privately employed counterparts. With regard to the historic separation between early childhood education and child care, they note the long-standing pay disparity between education and social welfare programs: "Salaries in education, although low, have traditionally been higher than salaries for social services positions, even when levels of education are comparable."

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Mary E. Dilworth, Director
Judy A. Beck, Associate Director

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